

Series: DON'T CHECK YOUR BRAIN—May 7, 2006

**WHAT IN THE WORLD IS 'TRUTH'?
Matthew 5:17-19; 2 Timothy 3:16**

I. INTRO

- A. I used to have a professor in one of my doctoral classes who was a card-carrying member of the ***Flat Earth Society***. Now, he did that as a joke—but it's true. There is a society who believes, and has scientific theory to prove, that the earth really is flat. Look it up on Google some time. They believe that Christopher Columbus used a whole series of hoaxes to deceive people into believing that the world was a round chunk of rock flying through space at thousands of miles per hour. They believe that all of our space programs have perpetuated the hoax by using fake images.
-Now I'm ***really*** puzzled! Who's right?

1. Every day we have to make choices about who's telling us the truth and who's not. We stake our lives on those choices. We're not very good at it when we start out in life.

-I had an evil next door neighbor named Richard Ferris. He was about 5 years older than me. One day he told me that he and his friend wanted me to be a member of their club. I was ***honored!*** But to be a member, I had to come to their club house and sit in a special chair while they conferred on me this special status. What I ***didn't*** know was that they had cut a hole in the chair so that the barrel of a BB gun would fit through it. Guess what happened as I sat in their special chair waiting to be a member of their club. ***Bam!*** Being a member of their club was, quite literally, a pain in the butt!

2. We get a little more discerning in life. We don't automatically believe that someone has a great financial deal for us; that if we buy the car that's being advertised, all these beautiful chicks will want to ride with us.

-And conspiracy theories abound! That JFK was murdered by the CIA, that George Bush was involved in the 9-11 conspiracy to hit the twin towers and Pentagon with passenger jets; that Elvis is still alive and well—a little pudgy, maybe, but somewhere rockin' in a nursing home.

3. The problem is that every single day of our lives, we have to live in a world where we, in essence, trust what someone else says or does. From banks to planes to getting a glass of water from the faucet to buying produce at No Frills. From surgeons, gas stations, car makers, employers, neighbors, toy manufacturers—we ***have*** to believe that, beyond a reasonable doubt, we can trust people. The alternative is to move into the wilderness—or live in fear every day.

-In a world that **loves** conspiracy theories, you have to trust a plane, a car, the people who build homes and highways and office buildings that, you will be okay. That what you stake your life on is real and true and not some trick chair where you'll get stung.

- B. I'm always amazed at the number of new conspiracy theories that come up about what the Bible says. It's like Time publishes one a month.

The Gospel of Judas comes out—written 200 years after Jesus. Hmmm! Do we believe the Gospel of John—or Judas. Like **The Jesus Papers**—based on secret letters Jesus apparently wrote to the Roman government. Hmmm—was there a conspiracy to get Jesus off the cross so he could marry Mary Magdalene and move to France. Dan Brown says that the church and Constantine conspired to make Jesus divine, when all Jesus really wanted was Mary Magdalene to run the church and celebrate the sacred feminine in cult worship.

1. The real question behind all of this is, is there any reason to believe that the Bible is trustworthy? That what it says is truth on par with the truth that allows us to fly on planes, drink tap water, drive in a car on the DVP at 100 kph. Okay, 10 kph! -Or, or is it wishful thinking. Was it written by people interested in accuracy and fact—or was it written by imaginative people who didn't mind telling lies and myths to make their story sound more credible? -And, mainly, is the Bible really inspired of God? Is God behind the words as an accurate description of Who He is, what life is, and what He wants and expects. Does it tell the truth about spiritual realities we would never grasp on our own.
2. I've studied the Bible for well over 30 years, and I believe it is. This morning, I don't expect you to just swallow what I've said and believe it. But I would ask you simply to just think! Ask questions when I'm done. Then you'll have to decide on what **you** believe is true—and what you're going to stake your life and your eternity on.

II. THE BIBLE IS STAND-ALONE UNIQUE

- A. I believe that single most **obvious** fact about the Bible is that it is unique. The way the Bible was written is very unusual. It contains 66 books altogether--39 in the OT and 27 in the NT. The Bible was written in three languages--Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek over a period of 1600 years by 40 different authors. To get a feel for this, imagine what a book would look like that was started in 400 A.D.—completed in 2005—and written by a wide variety of people from several different countries. It would be a mess, wouldn't it?
1. The strange thing about the Bible is that, even though it's writing retains the personal style of the human author—everything it says about the core of life, the soul, about right and wrong, and about God is absolutely consistent. And there's a story line that starts in Genesis with the fall of humanity and finishes in Revelation with the final redemption of humanity.
 2. The Bible is also unique in how widely circulated it is. The Bible is without question the single most published book in the world. In fact, the printing press

was invented because of the demand for Bibles--and the Gutenberg Bible was the very first book ever printed. In this **past** year, over 60 million complete Bibles, 90 million New Testaments, and 1 1/2 **billion** Bible portions were printed. Nothing else even comes close to that.

-The Bible is the most **translated** book by far in the world. It has been translated into well over **2000** languages--and an army of translators boosts that number every year, sometimes for people for whom there is no written language.

3. I also think the Bible would get the award for being the single most **durable** book in the world. It has examined and studied more closely than all other books combined. It has been banned and burned and outlawed--sometimes by whole sectors of the world. But people have continued to hide it, print it, and sneak it into places where it is forbidden--sometimes at the cost of their own lives.
4. Now, **why** would people die for a **book**? Well, that has to do with another reason why the Bible is unique--it changes lives. It's **garage** sale season. When you poke around in the stuff people have laying on their driveways, you usually find a pile of books. People practically give them away. Why? Well, we read books once--maybe twice--and then they sit and gather dust.

-But if you come here on weekends, you'll find hundreds of people who gather to simply learn a little more about a few paragraphs out of this book. Hundreds of **millions** of people do that every week--all over the world. And for some, this carries great risk to their livelihood or their families.

-Ask them why? Millions upon **millions** of people will say, "What this book says has changed my life! It's totally changed the way I see myself, the way I understand life--the way I spend my time and my money. It's changed my relationships--saved my marriage. I don't think you'll find another book that has that kind of impact!

B. And the Bible tells you **why** it's unique. Listen to a couple of these passages:

1. ***All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16 NIV).***

The word **scripture** simply means **sacred writings**. This passage, written by Paul, says that these writings have been **inspired by God**. Many of you know that the word for the Spirit is **pneuma** or **breath**. This literally means that these words are God-breathed. And because they have the power and authority of God behind them, they are ultimate guidelines for how we live our lives.

If you believe this—and I do—it means that because these writings have come from God, they are **absolute truth**. The insight and information they give on how to live skillfully and know and please God is accurate.

With that in mind, you can understand why the Bible is the single most scrutinized, studied, and criticized book on this planet. Even so, no other book even comes **close** to the impact the Bible has had on health systems, school systems, legal systems and scientific research.

2. One other fact about the Bible. Some people say that the Bible is just a concentration of writings by human authors trying to understand God. You see that a lot. But listen to how that contrasts with what an eyewitness, Peter said: ***We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were EYEWITNESSES of his majesty...Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:16ff).***

What Peter is saying is this: “We’re not smart enough or brave enough or sophisticated enough to invent a life-changing story like this. The power of this truth comes from the Holy Spirit working through ordinary people like me to communicate truth.”

III. BUT IS IT HISTORICALLY AUTHENTIC?

- A. There are a lot of people who would say, “Okay—so the Bible is **unique**. And it does make some profound claims for itself. But that doesn’t make it **authentic** or **accurate!**” -Anyone every had someone say to you, “Yeah, well, the Bible is full of myths, mistakes and inconsistencies.” But if you ask them, “Okay, what **are** some of those mistakes, myths and inconsistencies?” A lot of people have just borrowed this from something someone else said. I suppose that’s fair—but I think most people would be blown away by the historical accuracy and consistency of the Bible.
 1. A casual read of the Bible will pull up a whole **pile** of historical references. References to kings, emperors, wars, military leaders, cities, and civilizations that are very easy to check out. There are **lots** of places for contradictions. And you need to know that there is amazing agreement between the Bible and other historical documents. Luke, for example, is an author who not only writes about Jesus—but writes about the early church. I just recently read a document that cited **84 separate** instances where Luke accurately identifies places, shipping lanes, leaders and cultural customs in his two books.
 - a. When you begin to study the history of biblical criticism, you’ll find a number of cases scholars boldly claimed that the Bible was wrong—and **they** were proven wrong by archeological research. Early criticism said that the account of Abraham and Isaac couldn’t be accurate because it talked about domesticated camels—and camels hadn’t been domesticated yet. Further

research showed that camels had been domesticated long before 2000 BC—when Abraham and Isaac were around.

The Bible talked about the Hittites. Archaeologists said, “There *is* no such civilization. The Bible is clearly wrong. Then they found them. Like cities, records and everything.

- b. Now, I could keep going, but the truth is that ***no archeological find has EVER contradicted the historicity of the Bible!*** Not a single one. In fact, discoveries like this have led some great archeologists to believe in the authority of the Bible. You need to know that no other religious book from any other great world religion can make this claim.
2. Let me tell you something else about the evidence for the authenticity of the Bible that may surprise you--and that is the sheer **quantity** of records available--and how close they are to the actual date of their writing.
 - a. How many of you have ever heard of ancient writers or historians like Herodotus, Tacitus, Pliny--or Homer. Has anyone you've heard every debated whether or not what they're saying is accurate—or been corrupted? I've never heard anything like that.
 - I was looking at some stats recently. Have you ever looked into how many ancient copies of these writings are still around? Take the historian Tacitus, for example. His writings are dated at around 100 A.D. Only 20 ancient manuscripts have survived--and they are dated at 1100 A.D.--1000 years after his original history was written.
 - b. Compare that with the NT documents. Know how many ancient copies there are? ***Over 5000 ancient manuscripts or fragments!*** There are no other ancient writings that even come close in volume, age and quality.
 - Do you realize that there are fragments of the book of Matthew that they now believe to be dated around ***70 A.D.***--just a few years after they were written? One ancient manuscript containing most of the NT is dated back to 200 A.D., and a whole Bible dating to 325 AD.--OT and NT. No other historical document even ***approaches*** that in age and quality.
 - c. And just a word on accuracy. You need to know the care that was taken in making hand-written copies of the Bible. Scribes would take about a **year** to make a hand-written copy of the Bible. When they finished writing a page, they would go back and ***count the letters*** to make sure it had been done right.
 - Listen to ***this*** fact. There are about 20,000 lines of writing in the New Testament. Of those 20,000 lines, only **40** are in question--and none of these deal with any major issues or affect interpretation in any way. Try that accuracy test on any other ancient document.

- B. One of the major stumbling blocks on this issue of the Bible's accuracy is the report of miracles. Some people would say, "You expect me to believe that a big fish swallowed Jonah—and he survived? That Jesus actually walked on water, raised the dead, and fed a crowd with a little boy's lunch? Come on! Give me a break!"
1. What this really gets back to is something we've talked about for the past two weeks. Is there a God—and did He create everything we see—including me. If God can create something as profound as this world and put the recipe in every cell—wound up in something almost too small to see with an electron microscope—why would he have a problem temporarily setting aside the laws He created to accomplish another purpose? God, by definition, is eternal and unlimited and all-powerful—and loving enough, I believe, to reveal Himself to people who are by nature skeptical!
 2. There's something else. The narratives of Jesus' miracles were written on scrolls that were read and distributed very close to when these events occurred—close enough for the people who **saw** these miracles to still be alive. The things Jesus did were extremely public, and even secular writers who didn't believe in him called him a worker of wonders.

-Let me give you an example of what I'm saying. What if I started publishing stuff about John F. Kennedy—that though he was shot in the head in Dallas, Billy Graham happened to be driving by, stopped, prayed for him—and miraculously restored him to health. Think people would believe me? It's been 43 years since he died—but it's still way too close to the actual event. People who knew him, saw him get shot, were in the room where the autopsy took place are still living.

-Just 30 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, Paul wrote a book to the church in Corinth, Greece, and gave them a creed that had already been in circulation for years about Jesus' trial, death on a cross and resurrection. This creed was circulating in the very city where it happened. Jerusalem. If it wasn't true—Christianity could've been discredited and shut down in weeks because Jesus staked everything he said about himself and about life on His resurrection.

Instead of being shut down, it took the Roman Empire!

- C. Now, let me make one more observation about the accuracy of the Bible--the one that I think makes most of us uncomfortable. And that's how incisively and accurately the Bible describes the interior of our hearts. Listen to this:

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and intents of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from the God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Heb. 4:12 NIV).

1. I have never in my life read a book that cuts so deep into the core of what really goes on in my heart—and what needs to happen to fix it. Sometimes I read the Bible—and it makes me blush when I recognize how unloving—or how filled with

pride I am. How willing I am to use someone else to make me look good. It calls this darkness what it is. Sin.

-Read what the Bible says about sex outside of marriage--how it scars the heart and uses and disposes of people irregardless of their feelings. I mean, it gets right to the core of our motives and attitudes. And frankly, we're not happy campers when we get exposed. It's a **lot** easier to just dismiss the Bible as myth.

2. Now, let's just lay our cards on the table. I suspect that there are a bunch of people who have a vested interest in steering clear of the Bible or discrediting what it says because it speaks in candid and unflattering ways about the lifestyle they have been living.

-See, the Bible brings up such unpopular things as sin, the need to humble yourself, confess your sins and ask forgiveness, the fact that there is a final accounting for the life you've lived--that there is a Heaven and there is a Hell.

-All I'm saying is that we just need to be really honest about this. When it comes to the authority of what the Bible says, don't just swallow what someone like a Dan Brown says about it in a novel. And don't believe it's true because I say it is. Don't check your brain at the door. But at least be honest enough to admit if the reason you don't accept the truth of the Bible is because it makes you look bad. If you have any intellectual questions about the Bible--I would be fielding them after the service today or talk to you in private.

IV. JESUS AND THE BIBLE

- A. There are a number of things that are said about the Bible in *The Da Vinci Code*. I'm going to talk about this in more detail in a couple of weeks in a talk called, *Jesus and The Da Vinci Code*. I think that will be really helpful. But, in brief, Dan Brown has said, by way of one of his characters, that the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were chosen out of 80—basically because they taught what the emperor Constantine wanted—and that the rest were discarded. That simply has no credibility based on history.

-The New Testament was written and authenticated and distributed to the church very early—most of it before 70 A.D. The New Testament books were chosen by the Early Church fathers because they were known to have been written either by an Apostle—or by a close associate of an Apostle.

The other writings—about 45 of them, only a few of which were “Gospels”—were written by **wannabe's**. They were written by people who had a theological perspective they wanted the church to revert to.

Instead of being written within the lifetime of the apostles and first witnesses, most were written at least 200 years after Jesus death. The ones they claim to be the authors—Peter, Barnabas, Philip—were **not** the authors. What they did would be the equivalent of me writing something, and then signing it “Billy Graham” or “Mother Theresa.” There is a very good reason these books were not chosen; they were fakes. -By the way, what I'm saying here is common knowledge in early historical records.

1. You may be thinking, “Why is this such a big deal to you?” I’ll tell you why. One of the things you see all through the Old Testament is prophecy about the **Anointed One** who was to come. As you read through the history of the Old Testament, these prophecies get more and more specific. They tell where he’ll be born, what the nature of his life and teaching will be—and then they get **very** specific about what will happen to Him.
 - Some of the most powerful evidence for the supernatural nature and truth of the Bible is the fulfillment of these prophecies. It’s estimated that Jesus fulfilled over 100 OT prophecies.
 - *It was prophesied that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem.
 - *It was prophesied that he would proclaim righteousness and justice.
 - *It was prophesied that he would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver—and that the money would be used to buy a field to bury the poor.
 - *It was prophesied that his hands and feet would be pierced in this death, that he would be beaten, that people would gamble for his clothes when he died. That he would be executed with criminals and put in a rich man’s grave. I mean, these fulfilled prophecies go on and on and on.
2. Let’s say that instead of 109 prophecies, Jesus just fulfilled eight of them. Know what the odds are of a single person fulfilling eight prophecies like that—made hundreds of years before? Have someone go out, throw a ring into one of the oceans of the world; then have someone who doesn’t know what ocean it went in throw out a fishing line--once. What do you think would be the odds of them pulling up that ring? Same odds. That’s just **eight** of them.
 - And I can tell you exactly why it was that accurate. The God who was behind these prophecies is the one who showed up that night in a manger in Bethlehem. He didn’t just perform miracles, he predicted exactly what would happen to him, that he would be beaten, crucified—and rise from the dead on the third day. That’s **exactly** what happened.

B. Not only did Jesus fulfill prophecy, he made it clear what He thought of the Bible. He saw it as God’s Word, absolutely true—with the authority of Heaven behind it. Listen to what Jesus own words:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law of the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, UNTIL HEAVEN AND EARTH DISAPPEAR, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of the pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished (Matt. 5:17-18 NIV).

1. There’s one thing nobody can debate. Jesus was a brilliant, truthful and honest person. Jesus has arguably been the most influential man in the history of the world. I’m sorry, but Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, Socrates, Moses, the

Beatles, and Bill Clinton don't even come close. He's the only one who has changed the dating system of history.

-In this passage, He made it clear that His role was to fulfill what the Bible said. What he said about the durability of the Bible was true; that no matter what people try to do to it doesn't really matter. It will be here as long as the heavens and the earth are. It will never be outdated, replaced or forgotten.

2. Let me bring out something else. Jesus, this person who forever changed life on this planet, didn't just make a broad statement about the Bible and stop; throughout his entire ministry, He continually quoted the Bible as His source of authority. Lots of people have wondered over the years if the stories of Adam and Eve and Noah and the flood and Jonah being swallowed by a great fish are real. Well, Jesus refers to them--not as myths, but as real people and actual events. -With the way Jesus talks about these events, you have to come to one of three conclusions: 1) either the records about what Jesus said are wrong, 2) Jesus was mistaken because He really didn't know or, 3) Jesus was telling the absolute truth. I choose #3. If Jesus was who He claimed to be, Son of God, I don't really have a choice.
3. I want to mention something else here. At the end of the greatest message ever recorded, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that those who used His words as a foundation for life would be secure in any storm. And He said that those who chose some other form of authority to build their lives on would find that their lives would crumble in the storms of life. Everyone agrees that the power of what Jesus said has influenced the world more than the words of anyone else. Most of us, right now, are in the process of building a life. It will become apparent, over time, what you are building your life **on**. I hope it's something lasting and enduring—and **true!**

V. CLOSING WORDS

- A. I want you to know something this morning. For what it's worth, I've been reading this book now for over 40 years; I've been studying it for 30. I am fully convinced that it is absolutely true, authorities--that its author, ultimately, is God. It is powerful. There are times when the truth of what it says have made the hair stand up on my neck; at other times, it has filled my soul with peace when I had no peace. It has helped me be a better parent, a better father, a better son, a better friend, a better leader, and a better person.

-It has helped me conquer sins that I never thought I'd deal with in this lifetime. I've read it through a number of times--and I'm still amazed by it every day. It is the best textbook I've ever seen on the human personality. And the depth of what it has to say about God is not only incomparable; it fits what we see in the universe—and in the mirror.

-I've not only studied the Bible for 30 years, I've worked with a **lot** of people—more than I can count. Without fail, I've watched those who've paid attention to God's Word and live

it with God's help thrive and grow. And I've watched those who've blown it off make some spectacular mistakes and, in some cases, crash and burn.

- B. But, that's my decision. You have to decide if there is ultimate truth—and, if there is, if it's found here. You have to decide if it's just another book. If so--then you have to decide what foundation you're going to build your life on. What's it going to be? What your friends think? **Do** you in fact have a middle line in the highway you're on? Are you wise enough to just chart your own course and turn out okay?

I want to encourage you to do a couple of things.

1. First, if you're not sure—**don't check your brain at the door. Look, read, examine, think.** Don't just reject the Bible because someone says you should. Be intellectually honest. Look for yourself. If it's true—and I am absolutely convinced it is—then it has **profound** implications for life—and for eternity.
2. If you believe the Bible is truth from a loving God on how to live well—then take the time in life to read it. Treat it like you **believe** it's the most important truth in life. Study it. You will find that it will pay off more than you'd ever dreamed because, see, its wisdom for **life**, but it's about **eternity!**